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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
23 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
23 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

The South Vietnamese Air Strikes of 23 March

1. Eight RVNAF Skyraider aircraft struck the Vinh Linh radar site just north of the Demilitarized Zone at approximately 1500 local Vietnam time (0200 EST) on 23 March. Eleven US aircraft flew in support of the mission. All aircraft returned safely.

2. According to initial pilot reports, the target was destroyed. [REDACTED]

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3. Following the strike, an armed reconnaissance mission was conducted along Route 1 as far north as Dong Hoi. Some hostile ground fire was received enroute, but apparently no lucrative military targets-of-opportunity were encountered.

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5. Preliminary analysis of photography indicates that the 22 March US strike against the Vinh Son radar site destroyed at least two buildings and damaged a third. Approximately 44 bomb craters are visible in the target area. However, the radar antenna and its revetted reinforced concrete support building appear undamaged.

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Bloc Military Developments

6. There have been no unusual North Vietnamese, Chinese Communist, or Soviet military moves noted in the past 24 hours.

7. The North Koreans have publicly announced their intention to send arms to the "fighting Vietnamese people." In a speech at a 19 March "support Vietnam" rally in Pyongyang, Vice Premier Kim Kwang-hyop promised that North Korea will provide the Vietnamese with "all types of material aid, including arms."

8. There is no new information concerning the delivery of Soviet military assistance to North Vietnam. Possibly reflecting an effort to explain away the failure of Soviet aid deliveries to materialize, East European officials are claiming that Communist China has refused overflight rights. Bulgarian and Yugoslav diplomats in Peking now maintain that the Chinese are intentionally holding up Soviet aid deliveries.

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Bloc Political Developments

10. Moscow and Hanoi have been quick to condemn alleged US gas warfare in South Vietnam. In an English-language broadcast to the United Kingdom, Moscow charged that "American aircraft have sprayed toxic substances on a mass scale among civilians." The North Vietnamese news agency scored the use of "poisonous chemicals" and "colored balloons containing noxious chemicals."

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11. TASS announced this morning that the Soviet permanent representative at the UN has handed U Thant a letter calling for renewed discussion of the concept of aggression. The letter states that the lack of a clear-cut definition of aggression by the UN plays particularly into the hands of the US, which "while bombing the territory and population of the DRV, is trying to justify these actions with references to international law."

12. [redacted] Moscow's policy dilemmas as the tactics for reasserting Soviet leadership in the Communist world seem increasingly to conflict with those needed to maintain the somewhat improved atmosphere in US-USSR relations.

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13. According to one recently available report, the Soviet Counselor in Paris called on the Foreign Ministry just prior to Gromyko's London visit to stress Moscow's "serious concern" that Washington continued to disregard the USSR's "clear warnings" about the possible consequences of US Vietnam policy. He repeated once more Moscow's warnings concerning the effects of the air strikes on Soviet-US relations, and asserted that "no high-level US-USSR meetings could be envisioned under present circumstances." He described Soviet aid to North Vietnam as "inevitable," and attempted to convey the impression that Peiping and Moscow were entirely agreed on the need for support for North Vietnam.

14. In the sphere of Sino-Soviet relations, Peiping has flatly rejected Moscow's plea for a cessation of polemics. In an authoritative commentary today in People's Daily and Red Flag, the Chinese blasted the "consultative" meeting of Communist parties held recently in Moscow and demanded that the Soviets capitulate on all major issues in dispute. Peiping claimed that Moscow's decision to convene the meeting had made it necessary for the Chinese to "criticize openly, and thoroughly expose" the revisionism of the new Soviet leaders. This direct attack makes it clear that neither Kosygin's visit to Peiping nor the confrontation between US and Communist forces in Vietnam has brought the quarreling powers any closer together.

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The Situation in South Vietnam

15. No major Communist-initiated actions have been reported during the past 24 hours. Viet Cong military activity continues moderately light with only scattered harassing actions.

16. The press reports that yesterday's massive South Vietnamese army helicopter assault against an estimated concentration of 1,500 Viet Cong about 10 miles from Da Nang resulted in the capture of only one guerrilla. The others apparently pulled out of the position two to three days earlier while the operation was still in the planning stage.

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18. South Vietnamese Government forces yesterday killed 26 Viet Cong, captured 37 (including 10 suspects), and seized 14 enemy weapons in a large-scale search and destroy operation in the Mekong Delta province of Kien Hoa, about 45 miles south of Saigon. The ground operation was supported by 39 UH-1B helicopters whose pilots estimated an additional 53 Viet Cong KIA by air strikes. The operation is continuing.

19. Premier Quat feels that the political situation is satisfactory, except for discontent from a few diehard Diemists and Catholic extremists.

20. Quat, who plans to visit various troublespots in I Corps today, told Ambassador Taylor yesterday that he felt peace movements were under control for the moment, that he had no real problems with civilian groups, and that relations with the military are satisfactory. He

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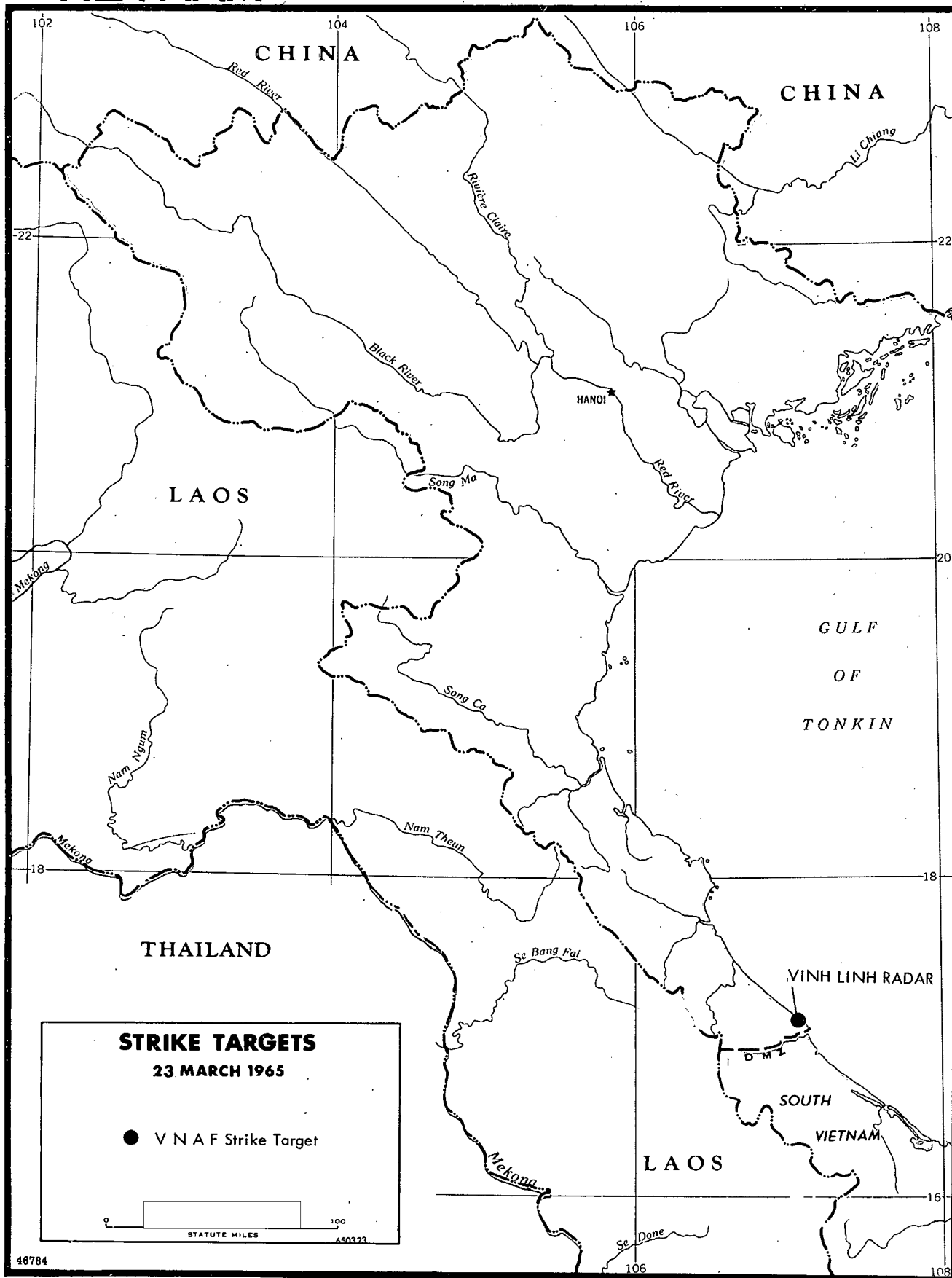
pointed to two weaknesses--inadequate psychological exploitation of the airstrikes against North Vietnam and difficulties in raising additional manpower in the South. Quat implied that he had reservations about the desirability of introducing additional foreign troops.

21. Ranking Buddhist leaders continue to express satisfaction with the Quat government. They state that last week's Buddhist conference agreed to avoid major political involvement unless their organization is threatened. A Buddhist spokesman reportedly has also informed a delegation of generals that the Buddhists will support the recent appointment of catholic General Huynh Van Cao as chief of the Joint General Staff, even though the top three military officers in the country are now all Catholics.

22. Saigon's military commander General Dong has complained that Air Vice Marshal Ky railroaded through his own proposals at the 20 March meeting of the Armed Forces Council which made Cao's and other command assignments. Despite Catholic control of the three top military posts, Dong claims that the meeting reflected moves by Ky, in league with General Thi of I Corps and the Buddhists, to place his own followers and Buddhist sympathizers in key military posts.

23. Continued Catholic dissatisfaction is reflected in the recent remarks of a once moderate Catholic intellectual who reportedly stated that a proper posture for defeating the Viet Cong had been half accomplished by the ouster of General Khanh and would be fully met only with the replacement of Quat by a Catholic government.

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